



ALESSANDRO SBORDONI 2023-02-08

## SEMIOTICS OF THE END: WELCOME TO THE VIRTUAL PLAZA

MASHINES BAUDRILLARD, IMAGES, POP, TIQQUN, VIRTUAL

Like factories, shopping centres today exist only to efface their omnipresence. After “society as a whole takes the appearance of a factory,” (p. 18) as Jean Baudrillard writes in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, society itself now takes the form of a shopping arcade.

At the same time, we are more and more like Tiqqun’s Young-Girl who “is only good for consuming, pleasure or work, it doesn’t matter” (p. 24).

This is what happens when capitalism is the only form of imaginary able to reproduce itself; there are almost no more differences between the imagery of the machine and imagination. In fact, everything is reproduced already faster than it is imagined.

There is no more distinction between work and leisure: indeed, leisure is equal to work. “You go to the office and sit at a desk, but maybe it is a fake job. Your real job is shopping” (from Adam Curtis’s short film, *Living in an Unreal World*). Welcome to semicapitalism. *What does not wither in an age of electronic reproduction is the urge to consume.*

## INTERNET’S ARCADES

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin attempted to account for the economic and political life of XIX century society through a study of the famous Paris shopping arcades: the glass-covered passages where the Parisian middle-class used to stroll and buy luxury goods.

The Internet is today’s shopping arcade, and the virtual plaza, one of its deluxe sites.

The virtual plaza is the emporium of semicapitalism, where the latter is reproduced through an aesthetics of palm trees, Japanese culture, and Neoclassical architecture. Not so long ago, the owners of the shopping arcades used to sell goods and services in exchange for money; now the artists and designers of the virtual plaza smuggle one semiotic good for another.

*At the end of the world there will only be a liquid advertisement and gaseous desire. Sublimated from our bodies, our untethered senses will endlessly ride escalators through pristine artificial environments, [...] consuming and consumed by a relentlessly rich economy of sensory information, valued by the pixel. The Virtual Plaza welcomes you, and you will welcome it too. (From Adam Harper’s infamous article, “Vaporwave and the Pop-Art of the Virtual Plaza”)*

In the virtual plaza, everything is now valued by the pixel. The arcade is just a sign like any other: in this regard, the fetish of the empty shopping centre is nothing except the fascination with the end of production as such. For if the empty factory is the end of production, what is the copy of its reproduction as an image? After the end of production, reproduction does not end. This is the irony of the empty shopping centre. And irony, after all, just makes people consume more.

In the 1980s, the environmental music of Haruomi Hosono was designed for MUJI retail stores in Japan. Today, the virtual plaza is nothing but the endless reproduction of its own aesthetics. Reproduction itself is at once the medium and the message of the virtual plaza.

## THE AGE OF ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin famously argues that reproduction represents the elimination of the *aura* of the work of art, its unique presence in space and time.

More and more today, the image is already a copy: it reproduces itself faster than it presents itself as an object in its singularity. “The reproduced work of art is to an ever-increasing extent

the reproduction of a work of art designed for reproducibility" (p. 12). As a result, the medium reproduces more and more of itself and its own image. There is almost nothing else besides the reiteration of such spectacle.

In the age of electronic reproduction, it is furthermore the imaginary of the consumer that is reproduced. More and more we are just like Tiqqun's Young-Girl, the avatar of the spectacle society that reproduces herself through the images of the spectacle. Both commodity and consumer, there is no aura around our own self-promotion and retail as an image. No identity except that of statistics; no tradition except that of mass consumption.

## WELCOME TO THE VIRTUAL DREAM PLAZA

"Through the eyes of the Young-Girl, the Spectacle is looking at you" (p. 66). "The Young-Girl does not speak," the collective Tiqqun writes. "On the contrary, she is spoken by the Spectacle" (p. 36).

The *Virtual Dream Plaza* is one of the products of the virtual plaza. It is a series of thirty-two hypnotic vaporwave jams by t e l e p a t h. Each jam includes an album cover art with a young girl (referred to as "dream girl" on the Internet), sometimes presented as part of an advertisement, at times as part of the background and the foreground.



*"I Need You"*



*"You and I Forever"*



*"Dream Girl"*

On the cover of three albums ("I Need You", "You and I Forever", and "Dream Girl"), for example, the young girl is both in the background and foreground of a makeup advertisement. In the last release from the *Virtual Dream Plaza* series ("Beyond the Dream", a bonus track), she is part of the compact cassette's design itself. In all instances, she is both consuming and consumed at the same time.





"Beyond the Dream"

Everything that is reproduced into an image is created and destroyed altogether; the alienation of reproduction. "The Young-Girl inhabits the Spectacle just like a woman in the primitive world, as an *object* of Advertising. But the Young-Girl is also the subject of Advertising, exchanging itself" (p. 76). The young girl is, moreover, the image against all that which is radically different from the reproduction of the spectacle — now more than ever, reproduction is the warfare of imagination — to the extent that she is set against the reproduction of the subject as such: the paroxysm of seduction. "Because the Young-Girl," as Tiqqun writes, "is the living presence of everything that, humanely, wants our death. She is not only the purest product of the Spectacle, she is the plastic proof of our love for it" (p. 105).

The exacerbation of the system of reproduction is possible only at the cost of the production of more destruction and nothingness: positive feedback. Vaporwave aesthetics is the production of the same, over and over again. This is a *negative*, rather than *positive*, feedback circuit. But an alternative, semio-accelerationist design of the virtual plaza is one where, instead, the

representation of the same is already equal to the principle of death itself. It is not just another product of capitalism but the critique of capitalism for what it always is: its own destruction and the reproduction of its inexorable end.

## A YOUNG-GIRL'S PLAYLIST OF VAPORWAVE MUSIC

Shut up, relax, and stream the dream. Enjoy the Young-Girl's mixtape from the virtual plaza, where everything is valued by the pixel, and where even your soft enjoyment and ironic remarks are welcomed and priced.

1. t e l e p a t h – *Virtual Dream Plaza*
2. 「サンセット Network 91」 – *HIGH-FASHION* [犯罪現場]
3. Trademarks & Copyrights – *Marble Girls*
4. 猫シ Corp. – *LUXURY GIRLS*
5. SAYOHIMEBOU – カラOK♪スターダスト東風
6. Origami Girl – *Tranquillity*
7. luxury elite – blue eyeshadow
8. death's dynamic shroud.wmv – *Faith in Persona*
9. Nova Dive – スロールック
10. 甘い夢のスケジュール – ロマンチックな至福

More in this series:

Semiotics of the End: Boredom at the End of the World

Semiotics of the End: Turbo-Violence

## REFERENCES

Baudrillard, J. (1993). *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (Trans. I. H. Grant). London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications. (Original work published 1976).

Benjamin, W. (1999). *The Arcades Project* (Trans. R. Tiedemann). Cambridge: Belknap Press. (Original work published 1982).

Benjamin, W. (2008). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Trans. J. A. Underwood). (Original work published 1938).

Curtis, A. (Director). (2016). *Living in an Unreal World: A Film by Adam Curtis* [Short Film]. Vice Media. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONzzSqHK-50>

Harper, A. (July 12, 2012). *Vaporwave and the Pop-Art of the Virtual Plaza*. Dummy. [https://www.dummymag.com/news/adam-harper-vaporwave/?fbclid=IwAR1XTf4USOLwZZPTScWNIGkNwz848rUvoyc8vGcSxWXPUCrb86P\\_J7hcUoc](https://www.dummymag.com/news/adam-harper-vaporwave/?fbclid=IwAR1XTf4USOLwZZPTScWNIGkNwz848rUvoyc8vGcSxWXPUCrb86P_J7hcUoc)

Haruomi Hosono (1984). *花に水* [Watering a Flower] [Album]. Sony Japan. [https://music.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_ICK7PnURbo84P4OV9pRt8sQvmxRQQ7Bl8](https://music.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_ICK7PnURbo84P4OV9pRt8sQvmxRQQ7Bl8)



t e l e p a t h (2015–2021). 仮想夢プラザ [Virtual Dream Plaza] [Album series]. Plus100 Records.

<https://virtualdreamplaza.bandcamp.com/>

Tiqqun (2012). *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl* (Trans. A. Reines). Los Angeles: Semiotext(e). (Original work published 1999)

taken from here

Foto: Sylvia John

[< PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT >](#)

---

## META

CONTACT

FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX

IMPRESSUM

DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

## TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES

TAGS

AUTHORS

ALL INPUT

## SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER